

ELIZABETH NESTA MARKS – THE FAMILY MEMBER

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Abstract

An insight into the family life and legacy of Elizabeth Nesta (Pat) Marks is presented.

Introduction

Elizabeth Nesta Marks was born in Dublin on 28 April 1918. Her Australian-born parents were in Ireland while her father completed his medical studies at Trinity College, Dublin and subsequently served in the British Army during the First World War. She was baptised in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin where her great-great-grandfather had been a canon. From thence, she was nicknamed 'Patricia' by her extended family. While her mother and father valiantly tried to maintain her given name, other branches of the family had different ideas and she became Patricia (or Pat) to all who knew and loved her.

Family life

Patricia was my mother's cousin. She was an only child of two independent-thinking, intelligent and inquiring people. They were a household of 'different characters' who often clashed but loved and admired each other. Their common love was for the outdoors and the conservation of the environment.

For over 60 years Patricia lived at 101 Wickham Terrace, in the medical heart of Brisbane and only a short walk from the city centre. Patricia's family was part of a larger commune of Marks and Dods relations who lived and worked in residences at 97, 101 and 107 Wickham Terrace. These properties extended through to Astor Terrace. It was here that Patricia learnt the importance of family, including her ancestors and those not yet born.

The Marks family's weekend retreat was a large bush property at Camp Mountain, near the village of Samford, just beyond the northwest outskirts of Brisbane. Their residence was a derelict workers' barracks from a nearby granite quarry which the family and friends had relocated and refurbished in 1942 (Marks and Cummins 2004). There was room to run some horses and riding was a popular family pastime.

Patricia became an excellent student (Fig. 1) (dux of her high school in 1934), swimmer, hockey player and horsewoman (Fig. 2). She received a 'blue' for her swimming and a half blue for hockey from the University of Queensland. This was to the amazement of the Marks family who preferred a less competitive lifestyle. However, her family genes came through with her love of poetry and books, her inquisitive nature and commitment to her family and friends.



Figs 1-2. (1) Pat Marks at her BSc graduation from the University of Queensland in 1938. (2) Pat riding 'Taffy' in the flag race at Samford Sports Day, 1938.

What I can offer here is a personal picture of Patricia Marks, a woman who was generous, formidable, inquisitive, rigorous in her work and a defender of family history and tradition.

Her family and their history were very important to Patricia. She became the caretaker for the vast collection of furniture, jewellery, curios and household items collected by her ancestors. Most of the historical items are now in museums and libraries (see Crozier 2006). However, many were kept by the family and, as was the tradition, they acquired names and perhaps personalities as well, such as Miss Johnson (a glass fronted cupboard), the Reverend Edward (a tall bookcase) and Mrs Bird (a clock).

Not often at ease with people, Patricia had a gruff manner which deterred the faint-hearted. Those who persisted discovered a woman keen to offer her knowledge, time and money for a worthy cause. Patricia supported a wide range of organisations, promptly paying her annual dues and thoroughly studying their material. 'I have been a treasurer' she once said, 'I know how nice it is to receive my cheque!'

Patricia's mind was always working. This was to the detriment of her day-to-day housekeeping and general tidiness. Her large living room was scattered with projects, historical investigations, critiques of a younger scientist's work, an obituary for a fellow colleague. It seemed like chaos to me. However, Patricia knew where everything was and admonished me if I tried to tidy or throw out. She spotted whenever I made a mistake or dared to intervene.



Figs 3-4. (3) Verandah of the Marks family retreat at the Samford property, destined to become an environmental education centre. (4) Pat Marks hosting a Sunday lunch for visiting Japanese Professor Seiroku Sakai at the Samford property.

To our relief, Patricia mellowed with age. Always passionate about her horses and an experienced horsewoman, she continued riding until she was eighty, using her younger relatives to saddle the horses, open the gates, and help her dismount. She gave increasing amounts of time and energy to the Samford community, the local museum and the aboriginal reconciliation group.

Her 84th birthday was celebrated at Samford. My brother surprised her by organising Patricia's grandfather's car, presently in the RACQ museum, to be brought out for joy rides on the day. She was thrilled! She climbed in and whizzed around the paddock with gay abandon.

Preferring her own company, she lived simply on her cherished Samford property for the last 20 years of her life. A goanna has been known to walk casually through her bedroom, a large python digest the in-house possum on top of the bookcase and the bush turkeys and butcher birds demand attention at the kitchen door. Her horses were 'her children'. She called them with a distinctive voice which I have since had to emulate to gain their attention.

At this peaceful haven, Patricia welcomed international scientists, students, family, neighbours and friends (Figs 3-4). Once you made your presence known, you were free to peruse her many books, wander the bush or even snooze the day away. This was where she taught us to ride, to be inquisitive about the nature of things and to hear the family history. It is here the family stood in a circle and spread her ashes when she died.

As part of her legacy, Patricia dedicated her property for ecological use and as a memorial to the Marks family. My brother and I, as executors, are presently working with a number of prospective beneficiaries to develop it for the study of ecological issues.

In the 1930s, whilst at the Glennie Memorial School, Patricia wrote to Bishop Donaldson requesting a motto for the dedication of the Donaldson Wing of that school. The motto, when received, was: 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.' It is a motto that Pat personally adopted and lived to the fullest.

I thank all those who came to honour our beloved cousin and to hear of her legacy to entomology and the Museum.

References

- CROZIER, B. 2006. Scientific items in the Marks Collection at the Queensland Museum. *Australian Entomologist* 33(4): 203-210.
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